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TO

PALOS PARK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
PALOS PARK, ILLINOIS

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WHY I AM STILL A PRESBYTERIAN

Thanks, greetings and best wishes...

Good process - but wonder about your endurance - 3 preachers, same topic -

Old sermon definition - 3 steps

Tell 'em - what you're going to tell 'em

-then tell them

-then tell them what you just told them

Wouldn't blame you if you came to that conclusion

Never heard of ~~O. Ding~~ Overdosing on Reformed Tradition, but you may be close - wonderful story about Presb + RC.

Six Questions: Paula

1. What does Reformed mean?
2. What is the "Reformed" world and life now?
3. Who are Presbyterians?
4. What is our Presbyterian heritage? (where have we been?)
5. How achieve unity through diversity in our history?
6. Where are we going?

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1. What does Reformed mean? - Could begin w/ Reformation but whole history is ours

A. -A quick time line

-After Jesus, friends, unorganized, part of Synagogue

-Deepening disputes, a rift and ejection

-Now what shall we do?

919 - 4570

-Gathered privately, in homes, on Sabbath

-Persecution - secrecy- Presbyters -

-Paul and missionary growth

-First Cons./Lib. argument over whether Christians had to be Jews -

-Liberals won - Big decision – diversity – universal

-Gentile Churches

-Persecution

-323 Constantine and Malvern Bridge

-Constantine ~~a~~ Christianity - Bishope - Pope

~~-Roman~~, Rome Declines Church Emerges

-Papal Empire

-A hierarchical super-structure

supported theologically by system of salvation by works, obedience

Luther's reformation - based on Scripture REFORMATION

Romans -

also a political revolution -

spread rapidly

France, exiles - John Calvin to Geneva -

much like Luther intellectually -

but more orderly

-one major difference - the Kingdom of God

Luther said 2 Kingdoms -

as Augustine had before and Acquainis

Calvin - not so sure: Kingdom of God growing in world, sovereign over world, meshed in - not a clear line -

So while Luther said who ever is in charge - God wills it and our job is to obey

John Calvin
~~Jesus Christ~~ hesitated and said, if Prince is not responsible, ~~faithful~~ you ~~faithful~~ have responsibility not to obey

-Revolution! seeds of dangerous notion of Democracy

-a new order in Geneva

Church order

City life

Public Education

Child Labor

Public ~~Manners~~ Manners - Justice

Ref. Fundamentals
1. Sov. of God
2. Auth. of Script
3 Salv. by grace

Review

-That is what distinguishes us, this relationship of faith to life

-To Scotland via Knox,

contra Romanism and Anglicanism and England

-To Northern Ireland

Expand in early American experience

-And to America -

Conducive
~~-Conclusion~~ to revolutionary ideas of ~~Saint Adams~~ SAM ADAMS, Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson

--A Presbyterian ~~revolutionist~~ Revolutionist said William Pitt.

in Parliament

Scotch/Irish - wanted liberty - freedom of religion and conscience and a society that reflects God's will...

B. Reformed means to stand ~~with~~ within that historic tradition...

It's not always admirable...we did not handle slavery very well -

But to be Reformed is to know that religion and life interface dynamically and that religion that doesn't - is irrelevant: i.e. religion that calls its adherents away from the world, either physically or theologically.

Because of

2. What is Reformed world and life ~~now?~~ view ?

Good question!

A. God's sovereignty

1) God as creator:

creation is good.

though fallen...the tragedy and evil is

not there originally

2) It is god's world, not ours: we are the stewards of the place... — the issue for the 21st Century

All sorts of implications, mainly ecological

(now a survival issue)

B. The Human Condition -

Reformers delved deeply into the topic of human sin...which Calvinists sometimes called "total depravity"...

A helpful understanding - i.e. an essential egocentricity from which we are quite in capable of escape

...it serves us very well, actually

...it enables us to put a premium on our own well being and survival

...but it does make a mess of relationships, great and small.

We live in a time that wants not to hear this - our quaint, obsolete, dismal, self flagelating belief...

But - Menninger thinks it is most helpful thing about us - "What Ever Became of Sin?"

-We ought to be very realistic about human nature and

We know that we live by grace of God and one anothers:

C. Society

1) God is sovereign: not the king or government...

So Reformed view is not conducive to a political system that demands absolute allegiance...

American Revolution is example...

Today - Allan Boesak's challenge to Sout African government is Calvinist based challenge to unjust and illegitimate political power...

He asks basic Reformed Question of government - in whose name do you rule?

Who give you authority?

Panama today!

-Reformed view is The people - not monarchy or race...

2) God's Kingdom and World interface

-so there are political implications to our religion

-politics is where religion is expressed

D. Sanctity of human life and conscience

-emphasis on human rights

-emphasis on right of each to live out dictates of conscience, - so we defend unpopular causes...

and while it get us in occasional trouble - it is very Reformed.

E. Providence/Predestination

-not fatalism, but a sense of God's participation and ultimately things are in God's hands...

-a trust that all will be well, even if in ways we do not understand.

3. Who are Presbyterians?

a. Depends who you ask -

3,000,000 - mostly white, middle class, middle of the road, mostly successful - but there are delightful and redeeming exceptions to all the above

b. We are arguably the original American Church -

-We came early to the colonies from English Puritanism Scottish and Northern Ireland Presbyterianism -

-brought hard work, respect for education, love of freedom and absolute distrust of concentrated authroity...

...and by 1750 we were biggest and best organized church in new world...

-education was our gift... colleges and schools everywhere

-and our next gift was our political views which helped inspire a revolution...

Presbyterians fought, John Witherspoon one of ours signed Delcaration of Independence

-were chaplains - see Tombstone in Upper Octorora - 1776

-New Jersey chaplain - used Hymn books for musket-packing - "Give em Watts, boys!"

-and ~~surprisingly~~ supremely - The Constitution whcih among other things reflects Calvinist view of humankind.

-our rights need to be preserved from others and from the states

-checks and balances

-people are sovereign

-and a tiered, representative form that looks remarkably like an older model - i.e. The Presbyterian General Assembly.

Those are very important...can't imagine our society without them...

Our future health is a matter of very great importance. to the culture

I regret our remove from Mainstreat - 30 yrs ago Ike at 475 & by Bush ahead of Falwell - now Pres. Bush 1 his own dad.

I'd rather have those values at spiritual center than

Mr. Falwell's

Swaggarts

Bakker

Robertson

or even Mr. Schuller's

And one thing further - and this may be most important of all...the word itself - Reformed

Motto of Reformed/Presbyterian Branch of Reformation was

Ecclesia Reformata, Semper Reformada -

The Church Reformed, Always Being Reformed

It is part of our heritage to live with a little unease even with our own institutions, structures and traditions -

Another way of saying it is that part of our tradition is to be a little suspicious of tradition...

Not in casual, flippant sense - which makes of religion a trivial thing...but deeply - as we ask always...

Is this reflection of our deepest faith - or are we doing it simply because we always did it this way.

Martin Marty - Last 7 Words of the Church

"But we always did it this way"

That's a very Biblical posture, by the way -

prophetic traditions or Old Testament

Jesus and religion of Pharisees -

By its nature Presbyterianism should be innovative and creative.

-significant that we have a disease named after us Presbyopic - a hardening of eye, restricting sight -

5. How have we achieved unity through diversity and where are we going?

A. We are diverse because of our theological ~~opinions~~ openness...you don't have to subscribe to a certain position: Room for all, big umbrella : Conserv. + lib. / fundamentalists moderate

B. We try to make that a unifying principle - not always successfully...but it is our genius and we must not lose it...people who disagree but still belong to one another. Based on grace.

C. Other side is that we are not terribly diverse

We still don't know much about racial inclusiveness.. and sociologically the very existence of denominations is a barrier to diversity -i.e. people who think alike and are alike tend to cluster... So, to a degree, we sacrifice diversity to the true diversity of the whole church of Christianity.

6. Where are we going?

We are losing members... and we've looked at that from every conceivable angle -

-in fact we're not losing members who quit and go to other churches, even some perversity in us seems to want to describe it that way.

We simply aren't making new Presbyterians as quickly as old ones are dying -

-Our birth rate is low... 1.5 children

-Growth in past has come primarly from starting new churches...and we're not doing that much any more...

-because we're broke...

-and we're broke for several other reasons: the places where churches decline are typically older, neighborhood churches - 75 years old, neighborhoods have aged, changed...sometimes ethestically... and church continues to age and become difficult to sustain

at same time - cost of ~~pay~~ paying for minimum staff has increased.

Takes all a church's energy to survive adds up to dismal future -

many won't

in meantime many are -

Central cities and suburbs -

We need to strengthen and cultivate those and organize new ones - intentionally - and learn all over again how to be the church in urban neighborhoods and towns...

A resurgence of spirituality and interest in values, beliefs...quality of life question

-a sense that this is a pivotal time

-technological revolution

-end of cold war

-ecological crisis (X) — end to new Narcissism & return to older wisdom that true joy is to be found in moderate, unselfish living -

I look for a renewed and re-energized Presbyterians -

Once we get used to our new home and new structure

and a very bright - and as always, lively future.

I'm still a Presbyterian because I believe deeply in those values which have brought us to this time -

that people can differ / disagree & still belong to each other..